



File

EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Bonn

March 10, 1983

12 APR 1983

Dear Bill

I am enclosing another speech
of mine which you may find of interest.

With every good wish, I am,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. Burns".

Arthur F. Burns
Ambassador

Enclosure

The Honorable
William J. Casey
Washington, DC



C-328

THE HUMAN SIDE OF GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

by

Arthur F. Burns

American Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany

Presented at

The Übersee Club

Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany

March 14, 1983

THE HUMAN SIDE OF GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

by Arthur F. Burns

As the Ambassador of the United States in the Federal Republic of Germany, I have often spoken about the political, economic, and security relationships between our two countries. This evening I would like to address a more fundamental theme -- the human relationship between your country and mine.

We are commemorating this year the 300th anniversary of the arrival in North America of the first permanent immigrants from Germany. The 13 Mennonite and Quaker families who in 1683 settled in Germantown, now a part of the City of Philadelphia, came in search of freedom -- the freedom to pursue their religious beliefs and the freedom to seek economic betterment for themselves and their children. They found both. I dare say that a great majority of the forebears of the approximately 60 million Americans who today claim German ancestry came in search of these same objectives -- personal freedom and economic opportunity.

- 2 -

Across the centuries, America has been identified with these basic human strivings. Our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution eloquently express these ideals, and they have served in all parts of the world as a beacon for people seeking a new life for themselves -- a life that would enable them to speak or write freely, to worship God as they saw fit, and to pursue economic opportunities without being encumbered by rigid customs or authoritarian rule.

The human significance of the centuries-old stream of immigration to America -- at first from Western Europe, later from Eastern and Southern Europe, still later from Latin America, Asia, and other parts of the world -- can hardly be exaggerated. Americans may justly note with pride that their country has remained a land of hope and welcome for uprooted people -- that it accepts even at present many more immigrants than does the rest of the world. Most of them still come in search of personal freedom and economic opportunity for themselves and their children.

- 3 -

The United States, in turn, has continued to benefit from the unceasing flow of immigrants to its shores. If they caused social problems at times, they also ultimately enriched our industrial, political, and cultural life. My country could not have developed the way it did, nor become the society that it is today, without the moral courage and the intellectual and technical skills that were continually being brought to us from the Old World, and particularly from your country.

The names of many of the German immigrants to America are well known on both sides of the Atlantic; and if I mention some tonight, they serve only as examples of those who have energized American life and culture. There is -- as the first of these -- Franz Daniel Pastorius, the founder of Germantown, a prophetic figure who projected a clear vision of the kind of country that the United States was to become. In advocating the separation of church and state, tolerance of religious and ethnic diversity, and the abolition of slavery, he was well ahead of his time. Another was William Rittenhouse, a minister and papermaker from Muehlheim on the Ruhr, whose great grandson, David Rittenhouse, served as the first director of the United States Mint and achieved lasting fame as a mathematician,

- 4 -

astronomer, and inventor. Thomas Jefferson was moved to say of him: "He has not indeed made a world, but he has intimately approached nearer its maker than any man who has lived." There was the printer, journalist, and publisher - Christopher Saur, who was the first to print the Bible in a European language in America. A more famous immigrant was John Peter Zenger, who is still known in the United States as the "patron saint" of freedom of the press. And there was Hans Nikolaus Eisenhauer, an immigrant from Eiterbach, in what is now Southern Hesse, who arrived in America in the middle of the 18th century, achieved neither wealth nor fame, but became the ancestor of Dwight David Eisenhower -- the 34th President of the United States.

And, if I may continue, there were also the heroes of the Revolutionary War -- Johann de Kalb and Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben; the political thinkers and reformers -- Friedrich Hecker, Carl Schurz, John Altgeld, and Robert Wagner; the bridge builder -- John Augustus Roebling; the organ builder -- Henry Steinway; the businessmen -- John Jacob Astor and Levi Strauss; the artists -- Emanuel Leutze and Albert Bierstad; the political cartoonist -- Thomas Nast; the musicians and composers -- Leopold

- 5 -

Damrosch, Arnold Schoenberg, Bruno Walter, Kurt Weil; the linguist -- Maximilian Berlitz; the banker and philanthropist -- Paul Moritz Warburg; the theologian -- Paul Tillich; the architects -- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius; the scientist -- Albert Einstein; the writers -- Thomas Mann and Hannah Arendt; and -- to round out this illustrative list -- your friend and mine, Henry Kissinger. Where would America be, or for that matter where would the world be, without the momentous contributions of these German immigrants!

These people, their children, and their children's children -- the 60 million Americans who claim German antecedents -- forged the chain that linked our two societies. These links had nothing to do with political treaties, security arrangements, or trade agreements. Indeed, they survived severe strains in the political relationship between our countries -- even two terrible wars. Perhaps the best example of the strength and durability of these human ties is the speed and commitment with which the people of my country devoted themselves to assisting the German people after World War II.

- 6 -

It was primarily the interaction between our two peoples that brought democracy and physical reconstruction to the Federal Republic and established the partnership between our two societies that exists today. To be sure, the Marshall Plan was a critical instrument in rebuilding West Germany's shattered economy. The North Atlantic Treaty provided the essential guarantee of security against aggression. Other actions -- such as the Berlin airlift -- further showed the resolve of the United States to share in the protection of the young democracy that had risen from the ashes of World War II. But the driving force of all these salutary political developments was the human network created by the millions of Americans of German descent, by the numerous German refugees who reached our shores in the 1930s, by the hundreds of thousands of German prisoners of war who lived for years in the United States, by the tens of thousands of Americans and Germans who cooperated in rebuilding the democratic society which the Federal Republic is today, and by the legion of Fulbright scholars and exchange students. It was their interaction that formed the foundation of the partnership between our two countries -- a partnership that has proved strong enough to withstand all sorts of temporary economic irritations and political differences.

- 7 -

These Americans and Germans who lived and worked together came to understand and appreciate one another. They knew or soon learned that they were bound together by shared values and convictions -- by respect for human rights, by faith in democracy, by devotion to the rule of law. And they transmitted these insights to those of their countrymen who had no direct involvement with people of the other nation. But by the late 1960s and early 1970s this creative generation of Germans and Americans gradually moved out of positions of leadership and influence. The network of human relationships that had so closely linked our societies thus became looser. The generation taking their places had no similar formative experiences, and as a result it had a less personal commitment to the German-American relationship.

In recent years the tight net of shared values between our two peoples has been sagging, in part because we are now less intimately involved with each other. At the same time, other developments began to cloud the optimistic mood, especially of young people, in our countries. Among these was the diminished lustre of the noble dream of a united Europe, the persisting hunger and despair in many

- 8 -

of the less developed parts of the world, the Vietnam War in which the United States had unfortunately become entangled, the civil rights turmoil in my country, the enormous Soviet military build-up during the 1970s in the face of a proclaimed detente, the political adventures of the Soviets in Asia and Africa and their invasion of Afghanistan, the suppression of the newly achieved freedom of speech and assembly in Poland, the rampant inflation and rising unemployment in the Western world, and -- not least important -- the growing feeling in the Federal Republic that its "Wirtschaftswunder" had come to an end.

All these factors, while not directly involving the German-American relationship, have cast their shadow upon it. It is an inescapable fact that the relationship between our two peoples has become less close. The educational system, which could have partially replaced the loss of direct personal experience between Germans and Americans, has failed us. The new generation has not been well served by the slight attention of our schools to the teaching of history, ethics, and the principles of our Western civilization.

- 9 -

Human understanding is always imperfect. That is man's lot on earth. We know this from our daily lives. Parents do not always understand their children, or children their parents. So it is also between husbands and wives, between employers and their workmen, between landlords and tenants, between bankers and borrowers, between professors and students. But if misunderstandings exist within our families, schools, and workshops, they have much greater opportunity to arise -- and even flourish -- among nations, since differences of history and language conspire with limited direct contacts between peoples to breed misunderstanding and at times, unfortunately, even mistrust. Foreign service is no longer an entirely new career for me; I am now well into the second year of my ambassadorship to your country. But I must confess that I still continue to be astounded by the strange opinions that highly placed Europeans now and then express about the United States, and -- I should add -- vice versa. Is there any wonder, then, why many of the young people in your country and mine have so little understanding of one another's society?

I have spent many hours with young people in your country, as I previously did in mine. I admire their

- 10 -

intelligence, their idealism, their horror of armaments, and their sympathy for the downtrodden. But I am also appalled by the ignorance that so many of them exhibit of the history even of their own country, to say nothing about their ignorance of the United States. And I am especially troubled by their apparent lack of appreciation of what it means to live in a democracy.

It is a puzzling and saddening feature of our times that many of our young people, perhaps even more so in your country than mine, seem unable to differentiate between the moral and political order of the West and the oppressive totalitarianism of the Soviet bloc. After all, the values of Western democracies are not abstract or elusive concepts. The liberty of the individual to speak, write, worship, and assemble with others; the equality of all individuals under the law; the protection of every citizen against arbitrary acts of government; the freedom to choose among economic, social, and cultural alternatives -- these basic values of Western democracies are practical realities that every intelligent person should be able to grasp. They certainly are thoroughly understood and appreciated by those who live under Communist rule and are not able to enjoy them.

- 11 -

The reason that many young people in Europe and America take basic Western values for granted must be that they have never been without them. They do not seem to realize that their right to demonstrate for a nuclear freeze, their freedom to press publicly for unilateral disarmament, their right to march against what they consider to be wrong American policies in Central America -- that these privileges are theirs under a democratic system that they themselves must help protect against those who would take them away, as they have been taken away from both the young and old in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Afghanistan, and many other places. Young people of average intelligence ought to be able to see the difference between the impulses animating America and those governing the Soviet Union. They ought to be able to recognize that the invited presence of American troops in Europe has the express purpose of helping to protect the values of our Western civilization, whereas the Soviet armies that have willfully occupied Eastern Europe for 35 years are there to insure the suppression of the freedoms for which their citizens yearn to this day.

- 12 -

The reality and the attraction of our Western values, it appears to me, should be clear to anyone contemplating the lives of the unhappy people under Soviet domination who, whenever possible, have taken to voting with their feet because they cannot vote any other way. There are millions of individuals who have escaped from East Germany, Poland, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Cuba and other Communist countries. But is anyone aware of a flood -- or even of a trickle -- of refugees migrating to any of these countries?

The misguided views of young people -- and even of some who are not so young -- are often attributed to the persistence and power of Soviet propaganda. I hear this repeatedly from my business friends. That explanation, however, is an escape from realities. The Soviets, to be sure, use every opportunity to defame our Western societies and to disguise the truth about their own. But their ability to do so with success derives fundamentally from the fact that both parents and teachers in our countries have failed to impart to children a sufficiently sound moral and historical education, so that they can appreciate the democratic institutions that they have been fortunate enough to inherit.

- 13 -

To be sure, the democratic systems that prevail in Western Europe and in the United States have their shortcomings and abuses. But what is noteworthy about a democracy is its capacity for improvement and renewal. Open criticism, evolution of institutions, and orderly change in the laws governing society are inherent elements of the democratic system. The Soviet system, in contrast, stifles through terror and repression any attempt of its citizens to change it significantly.

The young people of Western Europe must realize that if they wish to preserve their liberties, if they wish to enjoy the basic rights of a democratic society, they must feel part of that system, and they therefore must be prepared -- if it ever becomes necessary -- even to fight for it. As parents, teachers, and politicians, we have the responsibility on both sides of the Atlantic to make sure that the democratic values that bind us in the North Atlantic Alliance are understood and appreciated by those who follow in our footsteps.

How can we do that? I come from a background of teaching, and I naturally value the benefits of a good

- 14 -

education. It is clear to me that we must do a far better job of educating our young people in ethics, history, languages, and political science. This requires, among other things, that we be more alert as parents and teachers to the inadequacies of our formal educational apparatus, particularly the gymnasia in your country and the high schools in mine. The textbooks used in both German and American schools are often obsolete, and for that reason alone tend to convey serious misinformation about our respective countries. Teachers of history and political science have a special obligation to be objective and up-to-date. They can be aided in fulfilling this responsibility by an educational system that encourages and rewards those teachers who diligently continue their own education.

I also have a background in international finance. It is for me a familiar territory of relative order and predictability. International politics and diplomacy, on the other hand, are a new discipline for me. I find it a universe inordinately filled with gossip, emotion, and even suspicion -- a world in which perception of facts often obscure the facts themselves. This, I readily admit, is the situation in my country as it is in yours;

- 15 -

and I recognize that an ambassador must do what he can to clear out this underbrush of emotion and faulty perception that at times disturbs the relationship between his government and the government to which he is accredited.

The achievement, however, of true understanding between any two governments depends fundamentally on the kind of relationship that exists between their peoples, rather than on foreign ministers or ambassadors. Governments in democratic countries are inevitably influenced by, and to a considerable degree they even echo, the thinking of their citizens. It is therefore highly important that improvements in our respective educational systems be supplemented by a vastly greater network of personal contacts between the peoples of our two countries. Bringing about better understanding of our respective institutions of work and play, of life in our homes and communities, and of the aspirations and fears of our peoples should be our mutual goal. I know of no other way of re-establishing the camaraderie and understanding that existed between Americans and Germans after World War II -- a camaraderie that forged the partnership between our governments in furthering peace and protecting freedom.

- 16 -

A dramatic expansion is now needed of programs under which Americans can study, teach, or work for some time in your country, while Germans become correspondingly involved in my country. To accomplish this, both our countries will have to devote larger resources -- in manpower and in private and public financing -- to human contacts and exchanges. I am told that the United States Government now spends about \$115 million per year on its human exchanges with other nations, and that only a small part of that sum is devoted to West Germany. Private spending on exchange activities is much larger, but I am convinced that neither private nor public financing of this vital effort is nearly large enough. I would hope that five years from now the American Ambassador will be able to report to you that the moneys devoted by his country to exchange programs with other nations, and particularly with the Federal Republic of Germany, have increased at least tenfold. That is how essential I consider these exchanges to the freedom, security and prosperity of the Western world.

Let me now turn more specifically to the exchange activities between our two countries that I have in mind. At present, various academic exchanges under private

- 17 -

auspices are being supplemented by an academic exchange program conducted jointly by the governments of the United States and the Federal Republic. This program had its origin many years ago when an American of vision, Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, became concerned about an intellectual gap and proceeded to deal with it by sponsoring an educational exchange program between the United States and other countries. Its purpose was cogently described by the Senator when he wrote some years later: "Perhaps the greatest power of educational exchange is the power to convert nations into peoples and to translate ideologies into human aspirations. I do not think educational exchange is certain to produce affection between peoples, nor indeed is that one of its essential purposes; it is quite enough if it contributes to the feeling of a common humanity, to an emotional awareness that other countries are populated not by doctrines that we fear but by individual people -- people with the same capacity for pleasure and pain, for cruelty and kindness as the people we were brought up with in our own countries."

Since its inception the Fulbright exchange program has enabled about 130,000 Americans and citizens of other

- 18 -

countries to study, teach, or do research abroad, and thereby improve understanding between and among peoples of different countries. The highly successful American-German educational exchange program is a good example. At the outset it was entirely financed by the United States, but in time the German Government became so convinced of its utility that it now contributes nearly three-fourths of the total annual cost. This enlightened program deserves increased support from my government as well, and I am pleased to report that this view is widely shared in Washington today.

There is also a vital need for a greatly expanded youth exchange program. Looking to the quality of the future leadership of our societies, it is obviously important to foster sensible dialogue among young people at an early stage of their intellectual development. Attitudes in both our societies are often formed before youngsters reach the university level or embark on working careers. In view of that, it would be especially useful to provide larger opportunities for teenagers -- say, those between 16 and 19 -- to spend some time in the partner country. I am thinking of stays that would be of sufficient duration to enable youngsters to go to school,

- 19 -

live in a private home, and participate in the community life of the other land. A young person who has spent a school year or so in the partner country will have a real opportunity to learn to understand its society. That experience and knowledge will stay with him or her over a lifetime. I would hardly expect all young persons to become enamored of their partner country, but their doubts or criticisms will at least have been disciplined by some first-hand knowledge.

President Reagan recently announced an international youth initiative that focuses on this particular need with the vision and commitment that characterized Senator Fulbright's proposal back in 1946. The parliaments of both our countries -- your Bundestag and the American Congress -- have lost no time in endorsing the principle of expanding youth exchanges, and both our governments are already involved in translating their parliamentary resolutions into practice. For instance, a plan is being developed under which every member of the Bundestag and every member of the American Congress will have the opportunity to nominate a teenager from his or her electoral district to spend a school year in the partner country. This project, incidentally, would encourage our

- 20 -

elected political leaders to become personally involved in exchange activities, and it would thus establish procedures that should benefit our two democracies in the next generation. Not only that. It has been observed time and again that exchange youngsters reinforce the bonds of friendship they had formed with their host families through their own parents, other relatives, and fellow students. We need precisely such a matrix of human contacts to rebuild the warm spirit of partnership that existed between our two peoples during the late 1940s and 1950s.

Still another exchange activity that can yield rich dividends of understanding would involve young Germans and Americans who have already embarked on their life's work in business or farming, as journalists or churchmen, as teachers or government officials or trade unionists. They too will eventually have a role, perhaps even a major role of leadership, in our respective societies, and some of them should have the opportunity to improve their perspective on life by working for a time in another country. In response to a wise suggestion by the German Government, I am glad to report that we in the United States have begun to explore ways of cooperating with your country by including working youth in the enlarged

- 21 -

exchange activity between our peoples that is now being designed -- an activity that should involve our homes, schools, universities, churches, trades, and professions. It is only by strengthening the human relationships between our peoples that we can sustain our shared values.

In concluding this discourse, allow me now to summarize my message to you. Effective political, economic, and security interaction between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany rests on a foundation of human relationships between the people of your country and mine. Our citizens share a set of values that center on personal liberty, freedom of choice, and the rule of law -- values that they have developed over a period of three centuries. These values must be understood and accepted by our citizenry if our political, economic, and security ties are to be preserved. In order to understand and appreciate these values, our citizens must understand each other and each others' societies. To accomplish this we need to improve our schools and increase exchanges among our young people. Our two countries are fully capable of providing the resources to increase youth exchanges manifold, thereby avoiding doing too little too late. We owe this to ourselves, and we owe this to those who will follow in our footsteps.

- 22 -

President Reagan recently remarked that the best way -- in fact the only way -- to international peace "is through understanding among nations and peoples." I dare say that much the same is true of the preservation of our Western civilization.